

The Stage and Its People



Florence Odierhwa in "Hitchy-Koo" 1920 WHITE STUDIO



Harold Austruther and Marie Goff in "The Young Visitors" WHITE STUDIO



Delyle Alda in "Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic" CAMPBELL STUDIOS



Janet Stone in "The Greenwich Village Follies 1920" ABBE PHOTO



Mitzi and Boyd Marshall in "Lady Billy" IRA D. SCHWAB



Alma Tell in "When We Are Young" CAMPBELL STUDIOS

As We Were Saying—

By Heywood Brown

THE performance of Midge Kennedy in "Cornered" at the Astor Theater last week showed what surprising results a player may get with indifferent material. Persons who declare that the art of acting is on the decline, and mourn, would do well to consider carefully just what might happen to the theater if genius and high talent were bountiful. It is our opinion that under such conditions writing good plays would hardly be worth while. An actor who is fine enough can illumine almost anything.

Naturally, we do not mean that Midge Kennedy is quite independent of any need of straw, nor do we intend to suggest that "Cornered" is worthless material. It seems to us an interesting though extravagant melodrama. With only a little rewriting and a different touch in direction the performance could be changed without effort into the most delightful of satires on melodrama. Curiously enough, Dodson Mitchell, the author, is at present playing in "The Tavern," by George M. Cohan, and yet he does not seem to have sensed his opportunity to make game of his material. The story would lend itself to such treatment far more readily than the plot which Cohan took for "The Tavern."

Nevertheless, there is something to be said against giving "Cornered" its head and allowing it to run wild into absurdity. The play as now performed gives a hint that Miss Midge Kennedy possesses a distinct gift of emotional power. It seems to us a pity. Here is the most delightful player of farce and light comedy who has soared into vision for years and years, and yet for all we know in a season or two she may have become an emotional actress. Instead of seeing her mix cocktails for the comedy purposes there is at least the chance that we may have to watch and listen while she pays and pays, and pays, as all emotional actresses do at some time or other in their careers.

But for better or worse the fact remains that Miss Kennedy can stir other emotions than those of merriment. There were scenes shrewdly devised for sheer excitement in "Cornered" which Miss Kennedy did well, but in so far as the play attempted to express more profound feeling it was of the cheapest. The scene in which the hero mistook the thief for the heiress and made love to her was not creditable in conception nor was it felicitous in line, but suddenly from out the welter of mediocrity there came a sudden and surprising stab. Even the most careless and callous theatergoer could not fail to realize that all unwary he had stopped upon an emotional actress.

Such support for "Cornered" was unexpected. From another source, more closely charted, came aid which was delightful even if everybody knew that it was sure to be enlisted. Midge Kennedy, the comedienne, did miracles in lightening the melodrama at such moments as it seemed in danger of becoming heavy. For our own part we have a feeling that a perfect melodrama should have very little truck with comedy. If a murder has been done or a robbery committed our sense of social justice is so strong that extraneous humor seems to us a willful attempt to delay the guardians of the law. We don't want to know what the butler thinks about marriage. Our whole interest is centered in the question as to who it was who climbed up the stairs to the third story window on the night of October 31st and killed Lord Hammerly with a machine bullet.

In this feeling we must admit that public opinion has overruled us. "The Bat" turns aside again and again from

the pursuit of criminals to allow May Vokes to indulge in antics, and audiences unquestionably like it. They seem to feel that they need breathing spells and forget that while they are loitering the red-handed criminals may be making good their escape. "The Thirteenth Chair" still seems to us to have been almost the best murder mystery play we ever saw and it had just one joke, which wasn't very funny. It was something about taking a bath on Saturday night and was introduced merely to get a policeman off the stage.

However, it seems that we must have jokes with our murders. If this is the case then by all means the comic relief should come from somebody vitally engaged in the game and not from a substitute sprinting now and again from the sidelines. Midge Kennedy has been able to introduce the comic quality deftly and easily. She is able to turn it off at an instant's notice and get about the business of mystery and melodrama. More than that, when the long arm of coincidence is thrust into the play, somewhat too crudely, she makes no pretence that it isn't there, but gleefully comes up to shake hands with it. One realizes that he need not take the missing twin, and the mother lost at sea and picked up by a tramp steamer some little time after amnesia has set in, and all the rest of it seriously. Midge Kennedy doesn't.

The playwright asks a good deal of license in trespassing upon credulity in "Cornered," but when Midge Kennedy is the advocate we are willing to let him have entire freedom of the possibilities. "Cornered," in our opinion, may be set down as the second best melodrama in town.

Farce writers should make a pilgrimage each year to Grand Rapids to place a wreath upon the grave of Thomas Leonard Tannel, who first devised twin beds. Most dramatists should discover just what medical man it was who identified amnesia and pension his widow for life.

Students of the American language may be interested in watching the first act of "Cornered" to observe what slang is not. Few playwrights have failed so signally in achieving true talk as has Mr. Dodson in his scene in the chop suey restaurant. Most of the slang is merely a laborious product manufactured for the occasion. It is slang which was never heard on sea or land. Then there is, too, a little real slang, but of the meaner and more transparent sort, a short-lived sort of expression which is based on elaboration. True slang moves in quite the opposite direction. It is an attempt to simplify language. Sometimes it may carry the simplification too far and take shades of meaning out of our tongue, but if it is to live it must be a medium of convenient expression and not merely a roundabout way of making language jocose.

At the Columbia

"The Abe Reynolds Revue" is the title of the Columbia attraction. The performance consists of a number of short comedy scenes, with musical numbers and vaudeville features, and is presented under the name "Once Upon a Time." Mr. Reynolds heads the cast, and in his support are Art Mayor, Monica Redmond, Dot Leighton, Flossie Everett, George Mercer, Lloyd Pedrick and Spencer and Rose.

New Hobart Henley Picture

"Society Snobs" is the title chosen for Conway Tearle's recently completed picture. It is a Hobart Henley production for Selznick.

Mrs. Whiffen Spry After 55 Years Spent on Stage

CERTAINLY the playing of old women parts on the American stage is not very difficult for Mrs. Thomas Whiffen, whose delightful performance as Mrs. Carter Stafford is one of the many factors which make "Just Suppose," at Henry Miller's Theater, the appealing play that it is. If any one has had a longer experience in playing this kind of character in the theater her name does not come readily to mind. Since February, 1880, when Mrs. Whiffen played Mercy in "Hazel Kirke" at the Madison Square Theater, she has attempted no other type of role in any of the many productions in which she has appeared.

"Of course, when I was younger than I am now," she said between the acts at the theater a few evenings ago. "I had to give the various roles much more thought than is necessary now. I had to submerge my youth and think in terms of the aged. The scripts helped me very much in presenting my characterizations. Now the old woman roles which I play are not very hard for me. You know I am old myself," she said, alertly watching for her cue.

Although Mrs. Whiffen was born in England she considers herself an American actress, for of the fifty-five years that she has been on the stage fifty-two of them have been in this country. She came to this country with her husband originally as a member of the Gallon Opera Company, and her first appearance here was at Wood's Museum and Metropolitan Opera House (later Daily's Theater), in August, 1868, in an operetta by Offenbach.

"Offenbach was at his zenith then, but

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Ben-Ami Discards A Piece of Business

BEN-AMI, the star of "Samson and Delilah," was seized with a sudden fit of vertigo one evening last week while playing the rehearsal scene in the second act of Sven Lange's play. At the moment when he is supposed to sit down upon the footlights with his back to the audience to watch the rehearsal, he grew faint and toppled over into the orchestra pit.

Shrewdly, he seized upon the accident as all a part of his regular stage business and spoke several of his lines from the orchestra pit. The point at which the plot becomes so infuriated at the incompetence of Samson as to stop the rehearsal and assume the part himself, Ben-Ami used as a cue to climb back to the stage again. Only the few persons in the audience who were familiar with the play realized that the fall was an innovation.

Stage Gossip

BEN-AMI in "Samson and Delilah" will remove to the Thirty-ninth Street Theater to-morrow. Since the opening performance in the Greenwich Village Theater this play has been doing capacity business, and the transfer to Broadway, in a large measure, is a recognition of Ben-Ami's triumph in his first English rôle.

The short stay of "The Young Visitors," who remained just two weeks on Broadway, is a keen disappointment, not only to William A. Brady, producer of the play, but to producers generally, who would have been tremendously encouraged in their excursions for novelties. "The Young Visitors" made an excellent impression on the experts, and there was hope that the piece would remain, with "The Tavern" and "Heartbreak House," to signalize the producer who dares to trust his public. But, singularly enough, the public did not support the play and its withdrawal became necessary. "All I have to say," commented one producer, "is that the public deserves what it gets. Hereafter we give 'em girls. And bedrooms!"

This week is the final week of four Broadway productions. The engagement of "Hitchy-Koo 1920" will be brought to a close next Saturday because of the holiday bookings elsewhere and in order to make way for "Sally," which Florenz Ziegfeld brings to the New Amsterdam Theater. "Call the Doctor," the Belasco production at the Empire, is to go on tour, winding up with a Chicago engagement that will carry it well into the spring months. Frances Starr in "One" will play a number of the big cities in the East, concluding with an extended engagement in Boston. "Broadway Brevities" has another week to run at the Winter Garden before transformation into a tourist organization.

In his new production, "Sally," which opens at the New Amsterdam Theater Tuesday, December 21, Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. goes into musical comedy, making a departure from the type of revue with which his name has long been associated, namely, the "Follies" and "Midnight Frolic." Guy Bolton has done the libretto, Richard Grey the lyrics and Jerome Kern the score. The incidental ballet music is Victor Herbert's. The settings are by Joseph Urban and the piece has been staged by Edward Roce, with Ziegfeld assisting. Marilyn Miller and Leon Errol are jointly featured, with support drawn from the "Follies."

Of Nora Hayes in "Her Family Tree," now playing in Philadelphia, The Public Ledger critic says: "The staging is a genuine delight to the eye, with its plain lines of architectural adornment, the happily distributed lighting, the generally low tones of the costumes and their exquisite color combinations. It is pleasure to find so much thought devoted to these details, and it is likewise a satisfaction to record a great amount of laugh-making material in the entertainment."

Mrs. Oscar Hammerstein announces that her plans for the presentation of German dramatic and musical attractions in the Manhattan Opera House are almost complete. Alternating with music attractions, she will present dramatic novelties now being produced in Germany. Prior to the performance of "Hansel and Gretel" on Christmas Day she will give a drama entitled "Die Sündenfloke" (The Sin Bell), by Hans Knobloch. The dates are December 22 and 23.

Barry Baxter, the youth who plays the romantic lover in "Happy-Go-Lucky," now doing capacity business in Chicago, is to be featured next spring by A. H. Woods in a drama that is now being put into shape. Mr. Baxter won popularity in London with Teddy Gerard in musical comedy. It was at a performance in the London Strand that Mr. Woods attached Barry to his staff. The young actor has since shown ability to play serious rôles, and it is with the view to give him a "heavy" part that Mr. Woods is preparing the new play.

Why Cherish Stage Secrets? Inquires Miss Lotus Robb

LOTUS ROBB rushed down from her home at the upper end of the city to keep an interview appointment at the Punch and Judy Theater. "She was a trifle out of breath, not a little bit late, and extremely apologetic. But no fussy excuses about dressmakers, teas or receptions did Miss Robb offer. Instead she produced a tiny gold locket and opened it, revealing the picture of a smiling, chubby youngster.

"That's what kept me," she admitted naively, as naively as she insists in "Rollo's Wild Oat" that she is not a

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Does Linda Lee Just Cry for the Moon?

EVEN after she was eighty, Grandmother read and delighted in the works of Mrs. Southworth. It was vain to try to turn her attention to more modern fiction. She didn't care for up-to-date novels, she said, because "there isn't enough love in them," which brings up the point: Does the girl of to-day dream about love as did the girl of fifty years ago? Ordinarily you'd say she doesn't. But you aren't nearly so sure about it after seeing the rapt look on some of the faces of young women in the love scene in the first act of "Just Suppose," in the Henry Miller Theater.

Monty Warren, the young Virginian, has asked Linda Lee Stafford to marry him.

Linda Lee—Oughtn't there to be a kind of glory about it?

Monty—There is to me.

Linda Lee—Oughtn't there to be a kind of glory about it to both of us—a kind of splendor?

Monty—Dearest, mustn't there always be one of two who loves the most?

Linda Lee—And how would you like to go through life with me, saying to yourself, "She doesn't love me as I love her?"

Monty—I shouldn't mind, if I only had you.

Linda Lee—I wonder. I wonder if I'm only a foolish, romantic girl crying for the moon. I wonder if it's silly of me to want to be thrilled by the voice of the man I love—to be enchanted by his touch—to be intoxicated by the thought of him—to listen for his step as if it was a fateful thing—to be haunted by the memory of his smile—to feel something rare and precious in his slightest word—a dearness in his simple yes or no—to find him a sort of magic that shall make of my whole life a kind of song. I wonder if that's only crying for the moon!

The New Plays

MID-DECEMBER week brings two new plays into New York theaters on Tuesday night—"Lady Billy," starring Mitzi, in the Liberty, and St. John

Ervine's "Mixed Marriage," with a distinguished cast, in the unfrequented Bramhall Playhouse, which, he it said for pasting in the hat, is in East Twenty-seventh Street, two patternsters off Lexington avenue.

In the circular issued by Henry W. Savage, Mitzi's vehicle, which comes to Broadway after a successful preliminary tour of three months, is called a "musical romance." Zelda Sears, heretofore known to players only as an actress, now goes down in books of research and reference as author of the book and lyrics of "Lady Billy." The eighteen music numbers are the work of Harold Levey, a young "discovery" of Mr. Savage's and a protégé of Victor Herbert's. The piece is staged by John McKee and the dancing numbers arranged by the experienced hand of Julian Alfred.

The scenes of "Lady Billy"—there are three—are laid in a castle in Rumania, a Greenwich Village studio and a bachelor apartment elsewhere in New York. The plot follows the adventures of a young Rumanian countess, whose poverty forces her to play the ancestral ghost in medieval costume for the benefit of tourists who come to "do" the haunted castle. Surprised one day in her garden overalls by American visitors, the countess passes herself as the gardener's son and sings for their entertainment. A young engineer in the eighteenth party urges her to emigrate to America for a career as a boy soprano. Spurred on by her necessities and a love of fun and adventure, and the possibility of romance, Lady Billy comes to New York, chaperoned by the butler. The boy soprano is lionized by a futurist colony in Greenwich Village. Complications ensue and the plot ends in merriment and romance.

"Mixed Marriage," not the most recent of St. John Ervine's Irish plays, but one which well deserves an American audience, is Augustin Duncan's selection for presentation in the Bramhall Playhouse, with the backing of a new group of theater lovers. It is a play of modern Irish life in Belfast, somewhat in the style of the author's "John Ferguson." It tells the story of a pair of lovers caught in the cross currents of civil strife.

Tony Sarg announces for the Punch and Judy Theater a series of matinees beginning Monday for the presentation of his marionettes in "Rip Van Winkle." The Drama League Calendar comments on this venture in puppet acting:

"The interesting feature that comes entirely as a surprise—probably even to Mr. Sarg—is the serious success on the puppet stage of the play Joseph Jefferson made famous. It turns out that marionettes can be tragic when they are artistically imagined, fashioned and intelligently manipulated, and the lines are spoken with careful regard for diction, intonation and characterization. These are points that go far to make the success of the human actor. If they bring a large measure of success to the marionettes it suggests the question: What is the value of the purely human element in the art of acting?"

To his marionettes Mr. Sarg is said to give an individuality that playwrights might envy. Rip himself, his shrewish spouse, his cronies, Nick Veeder and Van Rummel, are plausible and amusing and each is endowed with a character all his own. Some of the technical feats are a Veeder exhaling smoke from a churchwarden pipe; puppet musicians playing their fingers on bow and strings and frots and tootling the flute; the puppet dog Wolf, with conscious flut-

Block Appointed Head Of Goldwyn Scenarios

Ralph Block has been appointed editor in charge of the scenario and research department of the Goldwyn company at the New York office and will assume the duties of his office at once. The department is to be developed to fit more accurately the growing needs of Goldwyn production and will comb the world for story material. Mr. Block has a wide acquaintance in literary circles both here and in Europe. He has just returned from the Goldwyn studios at Culver City, where he spent several weeks in close touch with the work of the editorial staff under the direction of J. G. Hawks, managing editor.

Before Mr. Block went into motion picture work he was a newspaper man and dramatic and literary critic. He was on the dramatic staff of The Tribune before going to Goldwyn. He has written a number of articles on the art of motion pictures which are to be collected and issued in book form soon. Mr. Block is now a member of the advisory board of the Theater Guild. He spent several months in England this year, aiding in the establishment of the English branch of the Goldwyn company.

At the Hippodrome

Charles Dillingham's spectacle "Good Times" at the Hippodrome, with its daily matinee, will cater to the Christmas shoppers during the coming fortnight, and among the bookings between now and the holidays are included several large parties for debutantes, social organizations and school and religious bodies. To-morrow night the Cornell cross-country championship team will be given an au revoir party on the eve of its departure for England, and throughout the week other features are scheduled. The new features prepared for the pre-holiday season of "Good Times" include a production by the Pender Troupe of Pantomimists from the London Drury Lane Theater, a dancing specialty by Miss Natalie and the corps de ballet of 200 dancers, and comedy interludes by Perry Corwey, "Foolies" Hanneford, Joe Jackson and Marceline.

More Tagore Matinees

There will be four more special matinees of Rabindranath Tagore's plays "The Post Office" and "Sacrifice." Three of these will be given at the Garrick Theater Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 2:45 p. m. The fourth takes place at the Neighborhood Playhouse this afternoon.